CANADA

and

IMPERIAL DEFENCE

AN ADDRESS

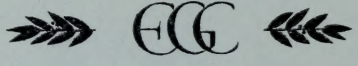
Delivered before the Canadian Club, Montreal

January 17, 1910

By

J. WILLIAMSON, M.A. (Oxon.)

(Published by request of the Club)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Canada and Imperial Defence

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen:

The great problem of the twentieth century to British statesmen throughout the world, is the federation of the empire, or the drawing together of its scattered parts into a closer union.

The last century saw the rise of national states based on community of race, language, or religion. Greece was united; Italy ceased to be a geographical expression; the German Empire was founded; the United States entered upon their career of expansion. But the new century already sees signs of a larger growth. The national states which rose upon the ruins of the Roman Empire are now in turn giving place to wider political organizations. The day of the small states, like that of the ancient city-states, is gone and the world-state has come. Russia, Germany, France, England, even the United States now stand for political and economic interests that are world-wide. To the statesmen of the British Empire, therefore, the supreme question of the hour is the protection of its vast interests throughout the world and the welding together of its scattered parts into a still larger whole.

The question of a preferential tariff lies beyond our present scope. It is unfortunate, perhaps, that the question of the defence of the empire has been combined with that of the trade relations of its various parts. The obligation to bear its share of the burden of imperial defence on the

part of any member of the empire is one thing; the fiscal arrangements it may find most suitable for itself, is another. The trade of England with the world is on so vast a scale that suddenly to distrub the existing conditions might be serious. The political effects, too, of any fiscal change are most important. The English open market of the world —the knowledge that all were free to trade on equal terms with its own citizens throughout a world-wide empire—has hitherto been a powerful factor in preserving peace. Without it the British Empire could never have been built up. Would the other great powers of the world have stood idly looking on while, one after another, nearly all the great trade markets were being seized by any single country? Look at Egypt, and the other enormous additions to the Empire in Africa in recent years. Such an extension was possible without a struggle largely by the knowledge that the "open door" for all was the foundation of British policy. The questions, therefore, should be kept apart. That of a preferential tariff is difficult, and on it there is room for much difference of opinion. But that of the defence of the Empire is simple and urgent. For, like the builders of the walls of Jerusalem in the days of Nehemiah, while working with one hand, the builders of the Greater Britain must hold a drawn sword in the other.

The recent march of events has brought home to the minds of the whole British people a deep sense of the reality of the danger which threatens the empire and the need for making it invulnerable. For the first time in a century Europe is in a state of unstable equilibrium. The weakening of Russia as a result of the war with Japan, for the moment has disturbed that delicate balance of power on which the safety of the smaller states and the peace of the world

depend. The flouting of public opinion and cynical disregard for the sanctions of international treaties seen in the repudiation of the Treaty of Berlin by the Foreign Minister of Austria in his dealings with the Balkan States afford much food for reflection.

For the first time, too, in a hundred years a desperate effort is being made to challenge the naval supremacy of Britain, with all the thought and determination of men who know clearly the end they have in view and are willing to make any sacrifice to reach it. Let Germany turn almost in any direction and the British Empire blocks the way. Nearly all the places suitable for European colonization, for naval and coaling stations, for "spheres of influence" for trade and commerce, are pre-occupied. Germany can realize her aims only at the expense of the British Empire. And the fleet that is being prepared in the North Sea is openly intended, at the first moment it has a chance of success, for a life and death struggle with Great Britain. Judged by its acts, Germany is as surely preparing for this struggle as she would be for war with France or Russia, were she mobilising an army on the frontier.

The danger is not imaginary. The real danger lies in shutting our eyes to it and thus helping to bring about the very occasion needed to precipitate the crisis. "Unless the British people are ready to fight and pay and work as they have not fought and paid and striven for a hundred years—if ever—the Empire will assuredly go to pieces and leave us beggared and disgraced under the conquest of a braver, better trained and better organized nation. The Empire is in danger. It cannot be saved by talk; it can only be saved by sacrifice and work. We shall need all our courage, all our money, all our strength." So writes

a prophet of the people after an exhaustive study of the question on the spot. The preamble of the German Navy Bill of 1900 expressly laid down that Germany must possess a battle fleet so strong that a war with her would, even for the greatest naval power, be accompanied with such danger as would render that power's position difficult. But this modest aim has long ago be given up for one much more ambitious. In 1904 the German naval estimates were £10,000,000 This year Germany is spending on her fleet alone no less a sum than close upon £22,000,000 including £12,100,000 for new ships; and she has the largest and best-equipped army in the world. In 1910, it is said on good authority, Germany will have at least 17 Dreadnoughts to Great Britain's 21; and 196 heavy guns to Great Britain's 202; and she can build new ships as rapidly. "That is a new and tremendous fact which vitally affects the situation." If ever there was a time, therefore, when it behoved the citizens of the British Empire throughout the world to rouse themselves to action, it is now.

But quite apart from all this: the present government of Great Britain have not hitherto erred by excess of zeal in naval preparation. Yet even they, with full knowledge of the facts, have been compelled to ask this year from the tax-payers of the United Kingdom, in addition to the army vote of £27,000,000, over £35,000,000 for the navy; and it may be £40,000,000 before the year is over. Yet of this enormous sum not one cent comes from Canada!

For, it is objected: "Canada itself needs no navy, has no enemies among the nations." Or again: "We have the right to have these problems studied from the view-point of the Canadians, in the interests of Canadian institutions and Canadian trade as well as in the interests

of British trade and institutions and interests." So it be; it is not denied.

Laying aside then for the moment all sentiments of kinship and patriotism, on the low level of material interests alone, with the disappearance of the imperial fleet as a predominating power, what would happen to the trade of Canada?

The imperial fleet protects the vast commerce of the Empire on every sea. In 1908 the total amount of the exports from and imports into the United Kingdom was £1,049,681,000. For the year 1908-9 the total amount of exports from and imports into Canada, after deducting the trade with the United States, amounted to $267,585,000; and the shipping entered and cleared was 93,371,800 tons. Now the loss of this enormous trade, or even its serious interruption for a year by war, would cripple industry and bring financial ruin on a scale so great that every family in Canada would suffer.

Or turn to the Pacific Ocean. The rise of Japan and the expansion of the United States as a world-power, spreading its wings over the whole continent of South America and seeking also to cover the expanse of the Pacific, have entirely changed the hitherto existing conditions. Some of the great international problems of the near future will centre in the Pacific Ocean. With the rapid development of Japan and the awakening of China, and the trade expansion on a scale as yet undreamed of with about one-fourth of the total population of the globe, rivalries and conflicting interests must inevitably follow which will tax the highest skill of statesmen to adjust. In all this Canada should play a prominent part. But without the support of an overwhelming naval force to fall back on

in the last resort, she will be helpless. The recent visit of the fleet of the United States to the Pacific Ocean showed that they at least were alive to the necessities of the case. From the point of view, therefore, of its immediate and material interests alone, Canada is directly dependent on the maintenance of the imperial fleet in overwhelming strength throughout the world.

Why then should the burden fall exclusively on the people of the United Kingdom? Such a fleet is of vital moment to the people of Canada as much as to the people of Scotland or England or Ireland. This is the merest commonplace. The claim admits of no denial from anyone who regards Canada as a part of the empire; and to hesitate for a moment to admit it is humiliating to every self-respecting citizen. Moreover the discussion is no longer academic. For the current year, the expenditure upon the navy is equal to about $4.00 for every man, woman and child in the United Kindgom. But how much longer will the tax-payers of that country be willing to bear alone a burden which in all fairness should fall upon the empire as a whole?

For Canada at least there can be no alternative. Independence is an idle dream. It is true her great neighbor has proclaimed to all the world a policy of "hands off" for the whole continent of America. But, even were it able to give effect by force to the Monroe Doctrine, for Canada to trust to this for its defence would be a suicidal policy. It would become absorbed in the system of the United States. Henceforth, it would exist as a state barely tolerated, with no interests in the outside world save such as it might suit its neighbor to allow. For the United States themselves are passing through a revolution

fraught with momentous consequences. The old watch-words of their great founders are being laid aside. For good or ill, with the restless energy of the race to which they belong they are taking their place on the platform of the world and claiming a decisive voice in the settlement of its greatest problems. And were Canada to be withdrawn from the imperial system—even were it possible—it is inconceivable that any statesman of the Union should tolerate on its border the existence of an independent state controlling the vast waterway of the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence, and possibly making treaties of alliance with some foreign power.

But, we are still told: "The truest imperialism is to build up our own portion of the empire and develop its resources, while at the same time being always ready to defend the country." The answer is simple. This is not imperialism in any form. It is selfishness, so pure and undefiled as to defeat even its own selfish ends. If all the other members of the empire were to act upon this principle, an imperial fleet would be impossible and the empire would crumble to pieces. The objection was, once for all, effectually disposed of by the representative of South Africa at the Imperial Conference of 1907.

It is no doubt true that the militarism of the age is an almost intolerable burden to the greater part of Europe and relief from it would be a blessing. But in the present temper of the world this is impossible. The defence of the empire is an urgent duty from which we cannot escape merely by ignoring it. All the same, the burden must be borne. If Canada declines to bear her share the burden is not thereby lessened; it is simply moved to the shoulders of others on whom it falls more heavily.

How poor is such a spirit when compared with that of the great leaders in the Confederation movement. "The time has come," said the Hon. George Brown, even then, "when Britain will insist on a re-consideration of the military relations which a great colony like Canada ought to hold to the Empire. And I am free to admit that it is a fair and just demand. It is only fair and right that Canada give its quota to the defence of the Empire." Compare the clear, unhesitating ring of words like these, which I doubt not even yet express the feeling of the country, with the halting, half-hearted, guarded utterances of some leaders of the present day.

For, it is no question of helping England merely. It is curious to note the mental attitude of some in the discussion of this question. They speak as if it were simply a question of our duty to the mother country in the hour of danger. This is to regard the subject from the wrong point of view. For, as Mr. Chamberlain has said: "The Empire is now, undoubtedly, not the Empire of England, but the Empire of the world." The question is not, therefore, shall Canada help England? any more than it would be for the citizens of Montreal or Toronto to ask whether they would stand by British Columbia if Vancouver were threatened by a hostile squadron from Japan demanding an indemnity for some outrage on its citizens. The real question is this: are we prepared to take up our fair share of the burden of defence of an empire which is more than England, or Canada, or any other of the Dominions beyond the seas—a whole, that is, which at once includes and transcends them all in the unity of common interests and ideals? No satisfactory answer can be given which regards it from any other point of view.

The attitude of Canada on the question has hitherto been far from satisfactory, when compared with that of other Colonies. Indeed, it might well have been that of those who did not regard Canada as an integral portion of the British Empire, but as trying to shape out a destiny of its own. The European population of New Zealand is only about one-seventh that of Canada. Yet, in view of the gravity of the political situation in Europe, it recently offered "to bear the cost of immediate building and arming by the British Government of one first-class battleship of the latest type," and of a second one of the same type if necessary, "their sole aim being to assist the Empire as far as their resources permitted, in maintaining naval supremacy." New South Wales and Victoria offered a Dreadnought if the government of the Commonwealth would not act for all the states. Then the Commonwealth offered to the Empire an Australian Dreadnought. But the Canadian Parliament was satisfied with passing a resolution fully recognizing "the duty of the people of Canada to assume in larger measure the responsibility of *national defence*," and adding that "whenever the need arises the Canadian people will be found ready and willing to make any sacrifice required to give the Imperial authorities the most loyal and hearty co-operation in every movement to maintain the integrity and honor of the Empire." This, no doubt, marks a decided advance. But even yet its terms leave much to be desired. What is needed first of all is a full admission of responsibility for a fair share of imperial defence, and a clear and distinct utterance once for all of the Monroe Doctrine of Canada, that for good or ill its fortunes are bound up in those of the great empire to which it belongs, and that it is prepared

to stand or fall along with it. The moral effect of such a deliberate pronouncement on the part of all the great self-governing colonies of the empire would be worth the cost of many Dreadnoughts. Any power planning seriously to challenge its naval supremacy or threaten any of its vital interests, would hesitate to enter on a struggle with the British Empire as a whole and its almost limitless resources throughout the world.

In no other way is it possible to defend Canada or any other portion of the empire. "It is our duty to stand for the defence of the Empire, as far as Canada is concerned," we are told. If this means that the people of Canada can best serve their own intersets by keeping their own troops within their own borders, and a fleet of their own within their own waters to protect their own shores, the thing is impossible. Should that dark day ever come when the fate of the British Empire, and, therefore, of Canada is made to hang upon the issue of a campaign or a naval struggle, the decisive battle when it does take place, will not be fought upon Canadian soil or within Canadian waters. The problem for Canadians, therefore, is not primarily how to defend Canada, or for Australians, how to defend Australia, or even for the people of England, how to defend it merely, from attack. *It is impossible to secure effective defence by each part of the Empire caring only for itself, even were it able.* The only way for each to secure even itself is to do its part in strengthening the whole. And the supreme need of the hour, therefore, is a fleet, actually and potentially of such overwhelming strength as to make the empire in all its parts invulnerable.

In wealth and population the outlying portions of the Empire have grown by leaps and bounds, each developing

its own form of national life on the basis of almost perfect freedom from outside control. And now we are confronted with a loose system of free—in their haste, some would say, even sovereign—states throughout the world, bound by those deepest ties: the sense of kinship, the inheritance of a great past of heroic achievement in all the higher activities of life, and common ideals for the future. But, so far from regarding this as final, it is only a transition stage in that vast process of development which, reaching far back throughout the past, we hope will last for many centuries to come. A crisis moment has been reached and we are at the parting of the ways which lead for ever in opposite directions. If the British Empire, built up by the self-sacrificing efforts of many generations is to stand—if its power and influence are to be felt increasingly for good throughout the world—nay, if its scattered members are even to maintain their own position and continue to expand, they must be brought together in some closer union. An imperial state made up of highly developed parts, but as a whole unorganized, in reality is weak. It invites attack from any enemy on the watch to strike a deadly blow the moment it can do so.

In many respects the condition of the British Empire of to-day resembles that of the Confederation of the Thirteen Colonies at the time of the Declaration of their Independence in 1776. That Confederation was merely "a firm league of friendship" between sovereign states to secure their defence. Congress dealt only with states, not with individual citizens. It had no means of raising revenue other than the voluntary contributions of the individual states. The individual states were so jealous of their rights that they forgot their duties. "The central government,"

writes a recent historian, "had to rely on the spontaneous loyalty of its subjects, a loyalty which waxed cold under the prolonged strain of war; and whenever its interests came into conflict with those of an individual state the latter was sure to prevail." The result was inevitable. In the day of stress it proved a failure. And yet that is precisely the condition of things we are asked to regard as the realized ideal for the British Empire!

At the recent conference in London, the Admiralty in the memorandum they submitted, stated that the maximum of power would be gained if all parts of the Empire contributed to the maintenance of the British navy. Since, however, not only strategical but also political and economic considerations had to be taken into account, it was suggested that if any Dominion government preferred a naval force able to "take its proper place in the organization of an imperial navy distributed strategically over the whole area of British interests," it should aim at forming a distinct "fleet-unit" as "an integral part" of the imperial force. Such a fleet-unit, in the opinion of the Admiralty, should consist *at least* of one Indomitable of the Dreadnought type, to be the first vessel to be built, 3 unarmed cruisers, 6 destroyers, and 3 submarines, with the necessary auxiliaries. The estimated cost of building and arming such a complete fleet-unit would be about £3,700,000, and the cost of maintainenance, about £600,000 per annum. Along with the creation of the fleet provision would also be required for ship-building and repairing docks, training schools for officers and men, and the supply of stores of every kind.

The proposals of the government have now been laid before the country. I do not propose to discuss them in detail. There are, however, some broad, general principles

which seem to commend themselves to fair and reasonable men. Let us assume: that Canada is at last prepared to bear a fair share of the burden of imperial defence, so far at least as the navy is concerned; that not a direct money contribution to the British government, but a fleet of some kind is to be the policy adopted; and that the expenditure involved is to be utilized in such a way that the service of the fleet may be rendered most effective. Then, it surely follows, that such a fleet, to be efficient in the highest sense, must satisfy the following conditions: (1) As recommended by the Admiralty it should comprise a distinct "fleet-unit" as defined in the memorandum. In the deliberate judgment of the experts whose opinion alone is worth serious consideration, this is the minimum to be attempted. And to refuse to accept the proposal is to incur a grave responsibility. Battleships of the very latest type are the pressing need of the navy at the moment; and where New Zealand and Australia with their much smaller population and resources have so nobly led the way, in the day of its prosperity Canada need not fear to follow. At all events, until it is possible to have such a fleet-unit for Canada, able to take its place in the imperial navy, if need be in the very front line of battle, it would be much better to have none at all. There is no need for any other; and the money spent otherwise, so far at least as the defence of the Empire is concerned, is practically wasted. (2) Its officers and men must be under the King's regulations in order that the general discipline may be the same throughout the whole imperial service. For (3) such a fleet, if it is to be really efficient, must form an integral part of the imperial fleet, to be counted on in emergency, of the existence of which, not the Parliament or Government of the Dominion for

the time being, but some higher representative authority shall be the judge.

The Australian Commonwealth has adopted the suggestion of a fleet-unit and is already giving it effect. But while the fleet is to be under the control of the Commonwealth whilst employed about the coast of the Commonwealth, in time of war, or emergency *in the opinion of the Senior Naval Officer representing the British Government*, all the vessels of the naval force of the Commonwealth shall be placed under the orders of the Admiralty. So far, however, Canada has not yet agreed to this provision, without which a Canadian fleet would be of little service.

A fleet could not be built and armed and manned in Canada for many years; and for Canada to attempt to build a fleet of warships at the present time would be folly and waste on a gigantic scale. Whatever may be done hereafter, let Canada follow the example of the other colonies, if her help is to be prompt and effective. What valid reason is there why the Admiralty suggestion of a fleet-unit should not at once be acted on, and the necessary funds voted for the building and equipment of the fleet in England, thus having it made ready within two years at the latest? Meanwhile progress could be made with the necessary accessories of such a fleet, and the training colleges for officers and training ships for men who might be recruited in large numbers for the service.

An era of great prosperity is beginning and we are on the eve of an enormous material expansion. If, therefore, the Dominion Parliament will not accept the responsibility of such a step, let the Provinces act as New South Wales and Victoria agreed to do. Or failing this, let the people themselves throughout the Dominion take the matter into their own hands, as they did in the Boer war.

It may be well to keep the Canadian fleet as a distinct unit in the whole, as a sign of national life and consciousness. The distinctive Scottish regiments have for generations been the pride and glory of their native land. Yet there are disintegrating tendencies at work which make men anxious for the future. And after having dwelt so long on the assertion of our distinctive individuality and rights it might be well to have some common sign of the underlying unity of the empire as a whole. What then could be better for the purpose than an imperial navy with its common flag in every sea throughout the world?

For once more we are urged to stand fast in the liberty wherewith we have been made free and not again to be entangled with another yoke of bondage. "Canada would at no price accept anything depriving it of its legislative autonomy." It has not been suggested that it should. Precisely the same difficulty was raised at the confederation of the Provinces on behalf of Quebec. The people of this Province it was feared might lose their nationality. But have they lost any of the rights or institutions peculiar to themselves, or any of their freedom? The very opposite is true. In becoming citizens of the Dominion, Frenchmen did not cease to be Frenchmen. They lost none of their distinctive features or privileges. By confederation the Province of Quebec did not lose its individual life; it saved it. So will it be with Canada as a whole and the other Colonies in the imperial system. To say, "I am a citizen of Canada," is to boast of no mean citizenship indeed. It has a wider outlook and interests than to claim, "I am a citizen of Quebec or of Ontario." But, surely, it is infinitely greater still, without any loss of autonomy or freedom, to be able to claim citizenship in an empire which covers one-

fifth of the globe and numbers one-fifth of its inhabitants as its citizens.

Finally, however, as we are frequently reminded: there must be no taxation without representation. No doubt of it. And when the great need of the moment has been satisfied this further question must be faced. Those who share the burden of defence must have a voice in shaping the foreign policy of the empire. By contributing their share the outlying members must be called into the councils of the empire; and their claims will then be irresistible. The citizens of ancient Athens when called upon to meet the danger of the Persian invasion answered with enthusiasm. Their patriotism enabled them for a moment to rise above the narrow, provincial spirit that was the curse of all the Grecian states; their self-sacrificing courage rolled back the tide of Persian conquest and saved Greek civilization to the world. Then their claims to full citizenship in Athens became unanswerable. They had discharged the highest duties of citizenship; they had shared its dangers and responsibilities; they could no longer be excluded from its privileges. The moral is plain. Let Canada and each of the other colonies of the empire once shoulder a fair share of the burden of defence. Then nothing will be able to hinder them from taking their place on a level of equality in the highest council of the Empire, by whatever name it may be called.

The difficulties in the way are great, no doubt, but not insuperable. They are not greater than—with the experience of a century for guidance they are not so great as—those which faced the statesmen of the same race who framed the constitution of the United States. And the genius of Englishmen for constructive statesmanship is still equal

to the task. Steam and electricity have annihilated space and time. The ocean no longer divides, it unites men; the North Atlantic is only another name for an English lake. With patience then, mutual forbearance, above all hearty recognition of the common obligation of defence and devotion to those larger aims that rise so grandly on the horizon of the coming time all difficulties will be met and overcome.

Out of the petty kingdoms of the conquest of Britain the English people built up the powerful monarchy of England. From a group of widely scattered states with, as it seemed, hopelessly divided interests, they have formed the United States, the Dominion of Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, and last of all the United States of South Africa. And now, when the fullness of the time seems to have come, of this we may be sure. That same genius for political organization which has made the English people as successful rulers in modern as the Romans were in ancient times, will not fail to find some outward form through which to express before the world the unity of heart and interest and ideals common to them all.

To say nothing of the Privy Council, as the last court of appeal for the empire as a whole, such a sign happily exists already in the King, who stands as head and representative of the empire as a whole. But, according to the principles of modern constitutional government, the King can act only through ministers who assume full responsibility for his action. Until now the King's ministers for Great Britain have been also ministers for the empire; but this cannot last much longer. By the sheer pressure of circumstances, if not otherwise, the present parliament of the United Kingdom, in the near future will be compelled

to devolve a large portion of its work upon local legislative bodies. At all events its imperial functions must be separated from its local functions as a parliament of the United Kingdom. The direction of imperial policy and protection of imperial interests must then be handed over to a body specially selected for the purpose and the way prepared for an Imperial Council that shall represent the empire as a whole. Such a body already exists in the Imperial Conference, organized in 1907 as a permanent institution of the empire. For, like some of the greatest institutions known to history and specially to the history of England, this Imperial Council has already come "without observation," and exists in their midst as an institution before men have yet called it by a proper name. For the present, it is true, it is still in infancy and its power is limited. It has no right of legislation, and perhaps may never need to have, so far at least as the antonomous portions of the empire are concerned. It advises only, through the deliberate advice of such a body would have all the moral weight of a command. Yet, composed of all its leading statesmen, it is the most representative institution of the empire as a whole, were the basis of its constitution so adjusted as to make it in some way truly and fairly representative of all the parts. To such an Imperial Council give the sole direction of the foreign policy of the empire and the function of maintaining its defence, with full control at least of the imperial navy. Give it, in addition, the power to levy a small tax directly upon the citizens of the empire at large as a sign and pledge of the unity that underlies them. All are eager in professing loyalty to king and crown, and would no doubt heartily contribute when once they had a voice in the shaping of

imperial policy and the administration of the funds for imperial defence. Do this, and you have already taken a long step towards the solution of the question to which I referred at the outset as the greatest political problem of the century, the federation of the British Empire, in the only way in which, perhaps, such a closer union of its widely scattered parts can ever be effected.